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ABSTRACT

A continuing partnership, such as between Johnson & Johnson and the public relations program in the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies at Rutgers, the State University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, sees the development of various benefits as well as perils. Such relationships begin with a contact phase, followed by arrangement, relationship, and finally a true partnership stage. Key elements of the partnership stage include arrangements and relationships integral to the operation of both organizations; mutual benefits, responsibility and control; and programmatic review. The benefits to such partnerships include resources that tend to flow both ways to both partners, increased prestige and credibility, and synergy. In a partnership between American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) and the Rutgers School of Business, Rutgers professors took 40 hours of AT&T Quality Managment training, and AT&T training personnel sat in on the pilot courses given by Rutgers professors based on a special manual they wrote for an ATT&T certificate program. Each group learned from the other and the courses that resulted combined both institutions' expertise. The perils include dependency, misunderstanding or misrepresentation, loss of credibility, and competitor envy. . Institutions that are not located near big corporations, might consider partnering with government. They will face the same benefits and perils. (JB)

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Campus-Corporate Partnerships: Payoffs and Perils

By Todd Hunt, Professor of Communication, Rutgers University

In an earlier article ("Campus-Corporate Partnerships: A Win-Win Relationship") I illustrated the value of cooperation between companies and universities by detailing the many ways Johnson & Johnson works with the public relations program in the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies at Rutgers, The State University of New Brunswick.

This article, based on a presentation at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in August 1995, at Washington, D.C., describes the way such a partnership grows and discusses some of the attributes of the partnership. It also weighs the payoffs against the perils of engaging in a partnership.

It is useful to think of campus-corporate connections developing and growing through four stages: Contact - Arrangement - Relationship - Partnership.

In the Contact phase, one organization makes contact with another, possibly through referral from a fellow professional, or even by one party picking up the phone and inquiring blindly about the possibility of placing an intern. In the case of the Rutgers-Johnson & Johnson public relations connection, the contact came when I found myself serving on the board of directors of the local regional professional theater with a member of the Johnson & Johnson public relations staff. We discovered our mutual interest, and the first activity linking us was that I recruited him as a speaker for our public relations career day.

In the Arrangement phase, the organizations regularly perform activities with or provide services to each other. If a company always takes an intern, always provides a speaker for career day, always supports a PRSA or IABC chapter by making a donation or taking an advertisement, then the company and the school have moved to the arrangement phase.

A Relationship develops when professors at the university and professionals at the company routinely call on one another for advice, for the names of third parties who can help on a project, and for appearances at one another's ceremonial events (such as receptions and award ceremonies).

The final stage, not always achieved, is Partnership. A partnership goes beyond a relationship in that things have progressed beyond "convenience" into "interdependency." The key elements of a partnership are:

Fundamental Structure and Process The arrangements and relationships are no longer niceties; they are integral to the operation of the organization. In the case of the Rutgers-Johnson & Johnson partnership, the company has budgeted for the interns and depends upon them to fulfill certain necessary functions; the school depends upon a certain number of students in the master's program each year to be supported by internships and uses the program to recruit top students.

Mutual Benefits, Reponsibility and Control Neither organization dictates the form of the program to the other. The parties negotiate everything and set in place mechanisms to ensure that each organization is achieving its goals.

Programmatic Review Similarly, both organizations -- separately and together -- review all elements of the partnership regularly, usually on an annual basis. Each party should feel free to suggest modifications to the other, and results should be compared or contrasted with stated objectives.

PAYOFFS: Here is some of what you find on the upside of partnerships:

Resources With an eye to the bottom line, the first payoff is monetary. Universities need financial support; students need jobs. Companies can provide both, in different forms. Universities provide skilled hands and minds to help the companies. Resources flow both ways.

Prestige and Credibility In addition to Johnson & Johnson, Rutgers has partnerships with other top firms headquartered in New Jersey, including AT&T, Merck and Dow Jones. Mention of those alliances speaks volumes when we explore relationships and partnerships with other companies. Again, it works both ways. In its catalog advertising courses developed in partnership with Rutgers, the AT&T School of Business touts the university as a national leader with top faculty who are qualified to teach AT&T Quality Management courses.

Synergy One and one can add up to more than two when corporations partner with universities. In the AT&T School of Business partnership, Rutgers professors took 40 hours of AT&T Quality Management training, and AT&T training personnel sat in on the pilot courses given by Rutgers professors based on special manuals they wrote for an AT&T certificate program. Each group learned from the other, and the courses that resulted had the added value of combining Rutgers and AT&T expertise.

PERILS: Now for the perils, some of which are the mirror images of the payoffs:

Dependency If Rutgers were abruptly to pull out of one of its partnerships, the immediate loss would be real: Fewer opportunities for students, and the loss of thousands of dollars in unrestricted support money used for scholarships and equipment. The corporate partners would find themselves having to perform many tasks and services handled by Rutgers faculty and students and would lose the vitality and fresh input the partnerships offer. In some ways we have become like suppliers -- both of our "businesses" are dependent upon a continuous flow of what each of us regularly supplies to the other.

Misunderstanding or Misrepresentation "Do you work for Johnson & Johnson?" a student once asked me. I had to think for a moment. (I am a stockholder, so I thought of replying: "No, they work for me.) Finally I explained that I work with the company, not for it. The Rutgers professors who teach for the AT&T School of Business received, as part of their AT&T training, a bulky "contractor" manual that details their responsibilities. (Among other things, we are called "consultants," not trainers -- which is an AT&T job description. Also, we are forbidden to give our business cards to students attending AT&T courses.) AT&T pays the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies for the training, not the individual professors. Care must be taken

when working with third parties -- such as the state government, or other corporations, contracting for Rutgers/AT&T quality courses -- to make clear exactly what the nature of the partnership is, and which parties have responsibility for which parts of joint programs and activities.

Loss of Credibility Not every faculty member puts a positive value on corporate partnerships. Some feel that teachers lose their objectivity when they work for or with corporations as well as the school. Faculty time spent on internship programs and corporate training can come at the expense of research and other scholarly pursuits -- although I personally feel that partnership activities yield data and resources that are most helpful to academics. At one school, some faculty questioned whether a choice of computers for a new lab was made based on an analysis of the best system for the context or on the preference of the corporate partner who was underwriting much of the cost of the computer lab.

Competitor Envy When a university decides to partner with one firm rather than another, the result may be that the other firm lowers its opinion of the school. For a state school, the problem is one of perception: "We support them with our taxes...but they send their profs and their best graduates to our competitor." Other schools also may chafe a bit when they see one of their rivals profiting from a partnership. The answer on this one should be: There's more than enough for everybody; let me help you do it (which, after all, is one of the reasons for this article).

At the panel discussion at the AEJMC Washington conference, the question arose: "What if my college isn't located in a town near a big corporation?" The answer provided by more than one panelist: Partner with government. Both the payoffs and the pitfalls are similar to those you encounter when you partner with a corporation. In addition, there may be an additional payoff: Providing public service through partnering.

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